

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH



COUNTY OF SAN BERNARDINO

OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
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Potential Disclosure of Patients' Protected Health Information

On July 27, 2010, the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health discovered that approximately twenty (20) sheets of paper that had been originally placed in a confidential shredding bin at the Public Health Clinic at 799 East Rialto Ave, San Bernardino, were improperly moved and deposited into a regular trash container. This container was emptied into a trash truck and taken to a landfill, where the sheets of paper were then buried. It is unknown what specific patient information was contained on these papers, but it is possible that some patient names, birth dates, and sexually transmitted disease results were listed on the papers. The Department of Public Health (DPH) has been unable to determine the identity of those patients whose information was accidentally taken to the landfill and improperly disposed of. Communication was made with the trash disposal company; however, the trash had already been deposited into the landfill making recovery impossible.

In order to avoid future instances such as this from occurring, the Department is going to retrain appropriate staff on dealing with protected health information (PHI), including the proper disposal of confidential information.

While there is no evidence that the information has been improperly accessed, individuals may take steps to protect themselves, such as obtaining a free credit report, which can be done by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com or calling (877) 322-8228 toll free, or placing a fraud alert on their credit report with one of the three major credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnionCorp). Additionally, the Federal Trade Commission offers resources for anyone who suspects he or she may be the victim of identity theft. The website is at www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/.

For further information regarding this incident, the Department of Public Health may be reached at 1-888-859-5023 Monday through Friday between 8 AM and 5 PM.

Gregory C. Devereaux
County Administrative Officer

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